

GOLF THROUGH ARTISTS' EYES

By S.J.H. van HENGEL

GOLF is a game with a very long, traceable record and an accompanying argument as to its place of origin: Scotland or Holland. That discussion may well go on for ever, since it will always be impossible to prove that it was not played in either country before a given date.

As far as documentary references are concerned, there is no doubt that these are older in Holland than in Scotland, and this also applies to pictures. Good painters and engravers were scarce in the Scotland of the 16th and 17th centuries, and the earliest picture showing golf in Scotland so far noted goes back only to 1746. In that year Paul Sandby produced a *View of Bruntsfield Links looking towards Edinburgh Castle*, which is now in the British Museum. It shows golfers in action, chiefly in a sandpit.

On the other side of the North Sea, the art of painting and drawing reached its greatest height in the 16th and 17th centuries. Among the surviving treasures of that period are quite a number of paintings relating to golf. They can be divided into two categories: indoor portraits, which are interesting from the point of view of detail, and outdoor scenes, which give an indication of the action.

If the indoor portraits are mainly those of children, it should be borne in mind that all of them were painted in a period during which the Netherlands was at war with Spain. It was thought to be rather unmanly for adults to be portrayed with implements of sport. Virtually all the portraits of men from that time show gallant warriors or pensive merchants, the latter presumed to be engaged in economic warfare, which was as vital then as it is now. There was, however, an exception to this rule. In winter, war came to an almost complete halt.

Thus, we find many pictures of golfers on the ice, there being nothing much else to do at that time of year.

Of the portraits illustrated here, Figure 2 is of a seven-year-old boy of the Slijper family of Enkhuizen, painted by an unknown artist in 1612. Some furniture was added to this portrait at a later date, and by a painter of modest attainment. The effect is strangely fascinating;

while the boy stands behind the table, his feet are at the side of it.

Figure 1 shows a two-year-old boy. Painted in 1595, he was thought to be Henry Frederick Stuart, Prince of Wales, eldest son of James VI of Scotland who later became James I of England. The fact that the portrait had hung for many years in Holdenby House, and was known as the Holdenby Picture, seemed to support that view. On the other hand the painting was executed on canvas—an unusual material at that time—and it was smaller than the other children's portraits from that period.

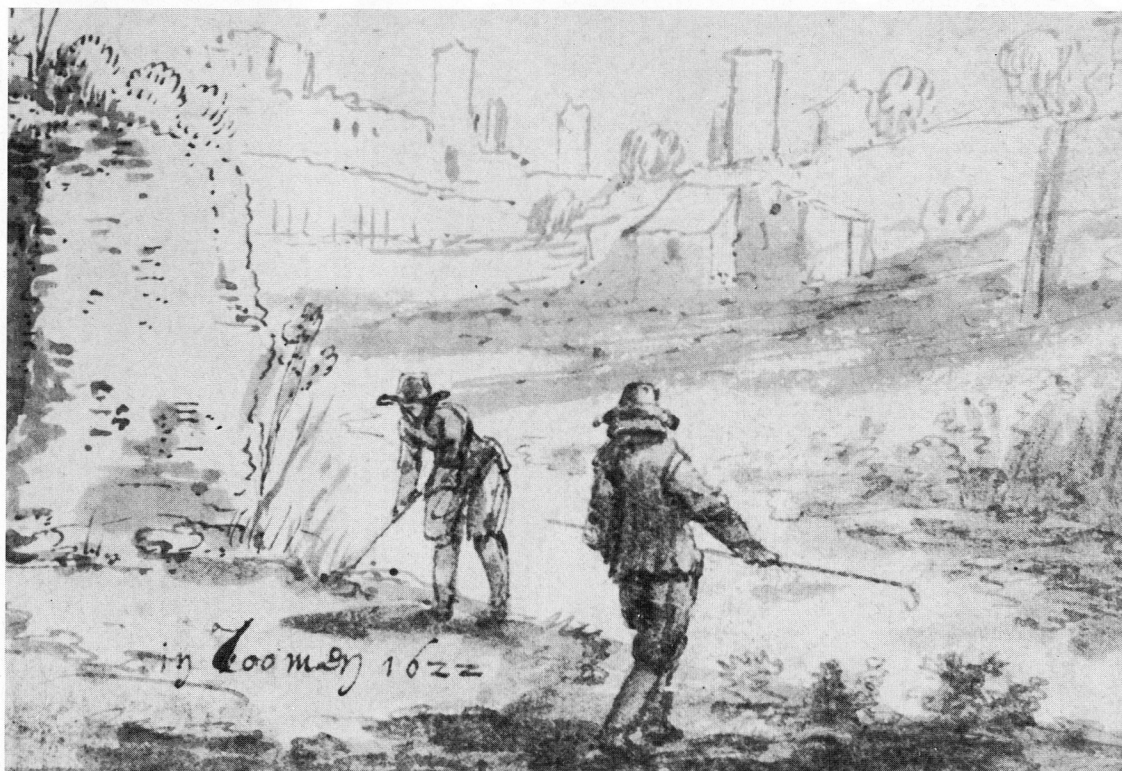
In July 1979 an almost identical portrait was auctioned at Sotheby's in London. This painting was more conventional in size and was painted on panel by Adriaen van der Linde, a Friesian painter of the period, about whom but little is known. The medal on that painting provided a conclusive answer to the identity of the boy. He is Maurits de Heraugières. The medal in question is known as the "peat-ship" medal. It was struck in 1590 after a design of G. van Bylaer, to commemorate the taking of the city of Breda by the army of the States General of the Netherlands, under the command of Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange, from the Spaniards, who tried to hold it.

The end of the siege was brought about after the fashion of the Trojan horse. On March 3, 1590, a ship laden with peat blocks, a popular fuel at the time, was left under the walls of the strong fortress. The Spanish occupants triumphantly pulled the ship into the city and moored it there, pending distribution of the unexpected fuel



1—"THE HOLDENBY PICTURE": A TWO-YEAR-OLD BOY (WITH GOLF CLUB AND BALL) THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN HENRY FREDERICK STUART, PRINCE OF WALES, ELDEST SON OF JAMES VI OF SCOTLAND, IN 1595. Artist unknown

(Left) 2—PORTRAIT BY AN UNKNOWN ARTIST OF A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MEMBER OF THE SLIJPER FAMILY, OF ENKHUIZEN, IN 1612



3—DETAIL OF GOLFERS IN ROME, 1622, BY CORNELIS VAN POELENBURGH



4—DETAIL OF WINTER, BY JAN VAN GOYEN, 1625

supply. During the night the company of men under the command of Capt. Charles d'Heraugières, a Huguenot who had joined the Protestant cause, climbed out from hiding under the peat, overpowered the watch at the city gates and opened them to let in Maurice's army. The next morning saw the city surrender.

In recognition of his audacious act, de Heraugières was made governor of Breda. Eventually he was presented with the medal in gold mounted on a chain. Charles married Maria van Groeneveld in 1591, and in 1593 their only son was born and christened Maurits after his commander-in-chief in 1590. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam possesses a painting of Charles in 1590, wearing the medal with the obverse showing and the text of the reverse painted into the background of the painting. Young Maurits is wearing the same medal with the reverse forward. It must have been given to him by his father as a christening present.

Painted within a span of less than 20 years, these portraits are worked with the precision customary for that period, and they give a good insight into the golf implements used then. The club in Figure 1 has a forged iron head with a "hose" into which the shaft was fitted. The other shows a shaft on to which a head of lead and tin was cast. Both types of club were quite popular at the time. The balls in the pictures are made of white leather stuffed with some material, presumably washed cow's hair, which was the common stuffing. They are of the type which served as a model for the Scottish "featheries". It is more than likely that these stuffed balls, which had by then been in use for about a century, were originally taken from the old French game of hand-tennis known as *jeu de paume*, to replace the earlier wooden balls. These had been cheaper, but they had a tendency to split, and, being brown, they were not too easy to find in the then unmown countryside in which the game was played.

The scenic pictures tell us more about the game in progress. It is clear that singles, foursomes and four-balls were played, but the nature of the course and the holes is more

streets were blocked, windows were smashed, and "good people" were hurt. City fathers turned their efforts towards directing the players to play beyond the ramparts, where the chance of damage to property was less.

"Holes" were agreed at the beginning of the game. Some of them must have come to be used regularly, but anything would do. There are records of holes in the ground (some even with flags in them) but also posts, trees, doors and (in winter) dinghies frozen in the ice.



5—GERARD TER BORCH THE YOUNGER'S ETCHING OF GOLFERS ON THE ICE, 1640

difficult to determine. The game was played whether there was room for it or not. The easiest way to start was to begin play in front of your own door. Streets were mostly unpaved, and if balls veered from their intended line of flight, the effects could be disastrous. Numerous city ordinances tell of prohibitions of the game because

There was a lot of betting accompanying the games, and stakes were high—too high, in some instances, for the taste of city magistrates. But, as early as 1387, the magistrates of Brielle permitted betting on golf so long as the players were beyond the ramparts.

While some old pictures showing golf in action have great artistic merit, all are interesting to present-day players for the light they shed on the game. Figure 3 by Cornelis van Poelenburgh is dated "Rome 1622". It shows a player struggling with the rough while his opponent gives him a line. Probably these two golfers are van Poelenburgh's fellow painters, Paul Bril and Bartholomeus Breenburg; all three were in Rome at the time and known to be frequently together. The putter seen in action in Figure 4 is a detail from the painting by Jan van Goyen, dated 1625. The kneeling putter on the ice, playing in a foursome (Fig 5), was depicted by Gerard ter Borch the Younger. This style of putting was quite popular. This golfer found a solution to the problem of getting cold knees; he put his hat under his knee while putting.

Illustrations: 3-5, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



6—JACQUES ALIAMET'S ENGRAVING, 1740, AFTER ADRIAEN VAN DE VELDE, 1668